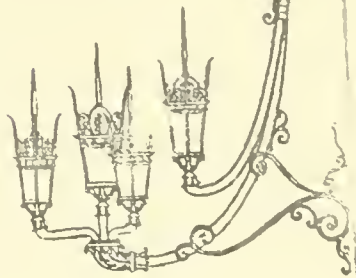


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BOSTON
PUBLIC
LIBRARY



BRA
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✓

MIDTOWN CULTURAL DISTRICT PLAN

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



WORK IN PROGRESS

Property Of
BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Library



A
PLAN TO
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GROWTH

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OFFICE OF ARTS &
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BRUCE ROSSLEY
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November 1987

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I N D E X

1

Framework for the Midtown/Cultural District Plan

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2

Meeting Cultural Needs and Opportunities

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Preserving the District's Character

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Transportation and Pedestrian Access

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5

Achieving the Plan

Appendix

FRAMEWORK FOR THE MIDTOWN/CULTURAL DISTRICT

The Midtown/Cultural District, once a thriving neighborhood of office, commercial, retail and theater activities, has undergone a long period of neglect over the past decades. The area today is characterized by several active theaters, cinemas, retail, vacant lots, parking lots, underutilized buildings and vacant theaters. The adjacent Chinatown neighborhood is an active residential community with busy restaurant and street activities. The district is situated along the Boston Common with its unmatched quality of open space and pedestrian connections to Back Bay, Beacon Hill and the Downtown. The area is served by three lines of the MBTA and is a short walk from South Station commuter rail service.

Interim zoning for the Downtown was enacted on September 25, 1987. The new zoning sets standards for development during a two year planning period that will culminate in permanent downtown zoning and in detailed plans for eleven districts of the Downtown. The district studies will examine particular design and development issues and formulate strategies for public improvements, district design guidelines, historic preservation, revised zoning, housing affordability, traffic management, and open space. Planning for the districts will be undertaken in conjunction with business, cultural, and community groups. The Midtown/Cultural District planning process is the first district study to be initiated as part of the new downtown zoning.

The existing concentration of underutilized land and buildings in the Midtown/Cultural District presents tremendous opportunities to create a vital mixed use district. A recent BRA Boston Office Industry Survey reported that the Midtown/Cultural District is considered to be a desirable office location, particularly for expanding Back Bay firms. The current 3-4% vacancy rate in the Back Bay is expected to remain low, and will create a constant demand pressure from that market area. In addition, there remains a growing demand for housing, hotel and retail uses in the Downtown and the Midtown/Cultural District provides an opportunity to satisfy these needs.

Boston is one of the few cities with a large concentration of theaters in one district. There are twelve active theaters and an additional seven vacant or underutilized theaters in the Midtown/Cultural District. Protecting existing theaters and revitalizing dormant theaters will be a major objective of the Midtown/Cultural District planning process. The performing and visual arts are an important part of Boston's heritage and contribute greatly to the city's quality of life. The arts are also an asset to the local economy. Over \$500 million was added to Boston's economy in 1986 due to performing and visual arts.

A Midtown/Cultural District Plan should help transform the area into a concentrated center of office, commercial, residential, and cultural uses making it a unique, vibrant, and liveable part of Boston. The Midtown/Cultural District Plan will promote land uses that generate the activity, diversity, and safety necessary to create a strong base of daytime activity as well as a place for evening enjoyment.

PRUDENTIAL CENTER
BACK BAY
COPLEY SQUARE

BEACON HILL



NORTH END

FINANCIAL DISTRICT

SOUTH STATION

FORT POINT CHANNEL



NORTH

GENERAL CONTEXT: MIDTOWN/ CULTURAL DISTRICT

Key objectives of the planning process are:

- o To incorporate a mix of residential, cultural, office, retail, hotel, and public space uses that will transform the Midtown/Cultural District into a part of the city that is accessible and alive at all times for all Boston residents.
- o To provide new downtown housing opportunities in the area to benefit neighboring communities such as Chinatown, and to create a 24-hour presence in the District.
- o To strengthen the image and identity of the District by protecting existing active theaters, revitalizing dormant theaters and concentrating new theater activities in the area.
- o To create new spaces for cultural uses that meet the special needs of Boston's established and emerging artists.
- o To generate a plan to finance the cultural facilities within the District and link the development of several prime sites in the Midtown area to promote cultural uses.
- o To restore the landmark buildings to re-awaken a sense of the area's historical and architectural value, and emphasize the District's place in the history of the city.
- o To improve and clarify pedestrian circulation patterns, to encourage foot traffic from Back Bay, Downtown Crossing and various points along the Common.
- o To develop a transportation system that accommodates the needs of various Midtown/Cultural District users without adversely affecting surrounding neighborhoods and pedestrian areas.
- o To provide for a unified and distinctive streetscaping plan which includes public space improvements.
- o To create a district with new sense of welcome vitality, safety, variety and interest for Boston residents and tourists alike.

MEETING CULTURAL NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and the City's Office of the Arts and Humanities are working together with local artists and arts service organizations on a plan to address the space needs of Boston's arts community and contribute to the increasing vitality of the Midtown area. This effort will locate a concentration of arts activity in Boston's historic Theater District, which has hosted the performing arts for more than 200 years.

Performing groups range from major, international organizations like the Boston Symphony Orchestra to small, emerging ones like New Voices. Visual arts facilities include two major art museums (the Museum of Fine Arts and the Institute of Contemporary Art), 30 commercial galleries, and 4 nonprofit membership galleries (the Boston Visual Artists Union, the Kingston Gallery, Bromfield Gallery and Gallery NAGA.) These organizations and individual artists maintain the quality and diversity of culture in Boston by performing and exhibiting in spaces throughout the city. The conceptual plan for the Cultural District would provide these artists with the opportunity to show and perform the best of their work in a central location. Boston as a whole would benefit by having a concentration of cultural activities that are easily accessible and affordable to residents and tourists.

- o The basic concept of transforming the historic Theater District into a multifaceted Cultural District comes from the arts community. There are currently over 150 arts organizations and 16,700 individual performing visual and literary artists in Boston. Local dance, drama, and music groups, along with visual artists, have joined with the arts service organizations to work on identifying the needs and opportunities of the arts community in Boston.
- o The conceptual plan includes a major cultural center to provide an easily accessible concentration of affordable performances and visual arts. The center would also serve as a magnet for the many satellite facilities in surrounding neighborhoods.
- o Over fifty performing arts groups, many of national repute, have no permanent performance space. The conceptual plan includes new or renovated theaters: 499-seat Dance Theater; 399-seat Flex-Space Theater; 200-seat Concert Hall; 799-seat Proscenium Theater; 400-seat Concert Hall; 199-seat "Black Box" Theaters.
- o The visual arts also have space needs. Many non-profit and commercial galleries have expressed interest in relocating within the Midtown/Cultural District and visual art facilities could be included within the Plan.
- o Opportunities for including Asian performing and visual arts, as well as restaurants and import shops, within the District will be identified. Rehearsal, shop/storage, and office space for non-profit arts groups are also needed. Complementary uses such as restaurants, cabarets, art and music stores, and programmed public spaces will also be encouraged.

Initial organizational concepts for the Midtown/Cultural District Plan involve the strengthening of the two concentrations of theaters and the use of the large "Hinge Block" between them as the site of a visual and performing arts center, and public open space.

Theater Boulevards

- o The large theaters in the Midtown/Cultural District serve as its major institutions, providing the anchors which maintain the District's identity and stability. These theaters fronting on segments of main streets could be strengthened as "Theater Boulevards", comparable in image and importance to Broadway in New York City.

Theater Alleys

- o Boylston Place and Warrenton Street have begun to house a string of smaller entertainment uses. These "Theater Alleys," playing a role similar to "off-Broadway" in New York City, could be enhanced as a focus of smaller scale activities such as new and experimental productions, cabarets, and nightclubs. Opportunities for other "Theater Alleys" exist throughout the District.

Visual Arts Center

- o The many sites within the large "Hinge Block" offers the opportunity to cluster small visual arts facilities and open space within mixed-use developments. By coordinating the projects, the Hinge Block could serve as the focus for the District. A network of pedestrian ways and spaces could provide connections that link the existing concentration of theaters.

Public Gathering Spaces

- o A series of open air and glass-covered public gathering spaces could play an important role in the development of the Midtown/Cultural District. City Place, in the State Transportation Building, will be developed as a meeting place and focal point for free performances and public art. Other spaces, large and small, throughout the Midtown/Cultural District, such as the Hinge Block, could also offer opportunities to add similar public gathering spaces.

Connectors

- o Main streets are important as connectors within the Midtown/Cultural District and to the surrounding districts. Active ground floor uses such as art and music supply stores, restaurants, galleries, and retail activities which remain open in the evening will be encouraged.

PRESERVING THE DISTRICT'S CHARACTER

The Midtown/Cultural District has historically been an integral element of the dynamic image of Boston as seen through the eyes of its inhabitants and visitors alike. The District's distinctive character has been shaped by Boston's tradition of unique topographical evolution. In response to changing economic needs the peninsula city expanded through landfill. These changes shaped and guided the District's character through office, retail, residential and manufacturing services.

Boston's somewhat sudden desire for cultural activities and family entertainment first found its home in the Midtown area during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Many office buildings converted ground floor space for productions of light opera, comedy, drama, moving picture and live entertainment. In 1882 (at 565 Washington Street), B.F. Keith first opened his "Museum of Curiosities" and lecture hall which initiated his career as founder of vaudeville. Many fine actors and actresses performed on the stages of Boston including Jenny Lind, Sir John Gielgud and Fanny Brice.

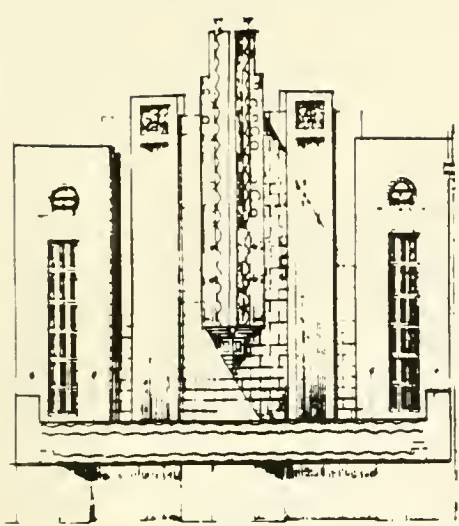
Today, the Midtown/Cultural District retains its tradition of diversity while maintaining the rich historical role as the city's original retail spine and cultural district.

- o The Midtown area can be divided into four areas: Downtown, Park Plaza, the Cultural District, and the South Cove. Each play a particular role in the development of Boston's downtown with their identity expressed through the character of uses, buildings, and streets.
- o Of the four Midtown areas, the Cultural District is the most under-developed. It is in need of a strong, positive coordinated image that will attract quality tenants, shoppers, theater-goers, and other evening visitors.
- o The architecture of the Midtown/Cultural District includes a wide range of styles reflecting a gradual and unplanned evolution from rural to urban and from residential to commercial. Several distinctive individual buildings from the Federal era have survived here, along with cohesive ensembles of 19th century commercial masonry warehouses and turn-of-the-century buildings.
- o There are seven National Register Districts within the Midtown/Cultural District which include numerous significant historic buildings. Many active and vacant theatres are among the historic structures. The architectural quality of the historic buildings and the concentration of theatre uses are two aspects of the District's character that should be preserved and enhanced.
- o The Boston Landmarks Commission has undertaken a survey of historic buildings with the downtown and has assigned each with a rating on a scale of 1 (Most Significant) through 6 (Non-Contributing). City policy encourages protection of buildings rated in categories 1-4; within the Midtown/Cultural District there are 69 such designated buildings.
- o The Midtown/Cultural District Plan will protect existing theaters and other historic buildings, and include strategies to provide the means necessary for these resources to be renovated and remain viable.

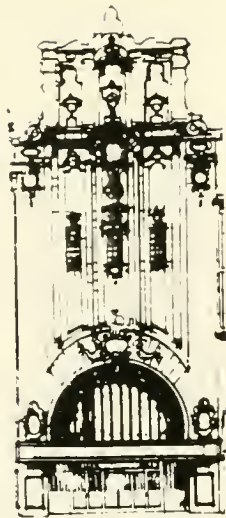
As part of the Midtown/Cultural District public planning process, an in-depth design study will be undertaken to develop a unifying development concept and guidelines for historic renovation, new architecture, streetscaping, public spaces, renovated facades, street lighting and signage. The Plan will emphasize protecting Boston Common from undue adverse shadow impacts; providing complementary active ground floor uses which are open in the evening hours; providing a unified image for the Midtown/Cultural District; undertaking public space improvements; and managing the programming and maintenance of public spaces.

The key objectives of planning process are to:

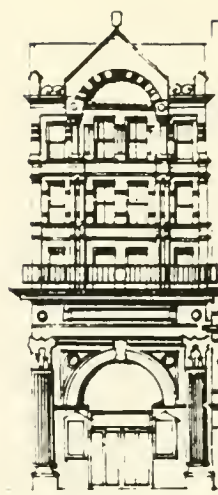
- o Ensure that the particular mix of uses in each development project enhances the surrounding area by adding street level activity and appropriate around-the-clock uses.
- o Protect historic buildings from adverse alteration and ensure that all new development is compatible with adjacent historically significant buildings.
- o Locate buildings substantially over 155 feet tall only on carefully targeted sites consistent with urban design objectives.
- o Ensure that building massing in new development reinforces the scale and character of the street and that new buildings respond to the height, scale, massing setbacks, and streetwall plane of surrounding buildings.
- o Emphasize the sense of human scale in new construction through familiar block and building sizes and forms, modulated and detailed facades and storefronts, and articulated entryways.
- o Ensure that along major pedestrian ways, continuous retail frontage is maintained to give the sidewalk a sense of activity and security by being visually permeable and providing interest at close range.
- o Reinforce the traditional pattern of blocks and street walls; maintain the existing streetwall plane in order to retain the street's continuity; in new development, provide additional public space whenever possible and appropriate; and make the design of public open space, interior spaces, and pedestrian ways an integral part of project design.



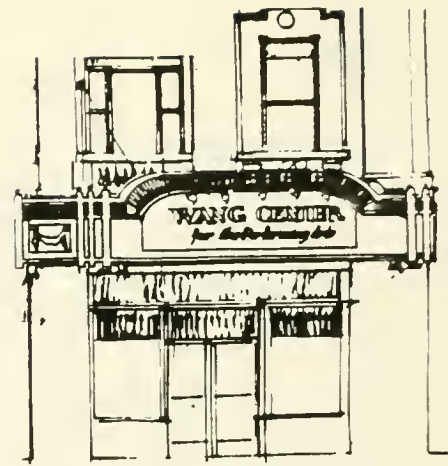
PARAMOUNT



OPERA HOUSE



MODERN



WANG CENTER

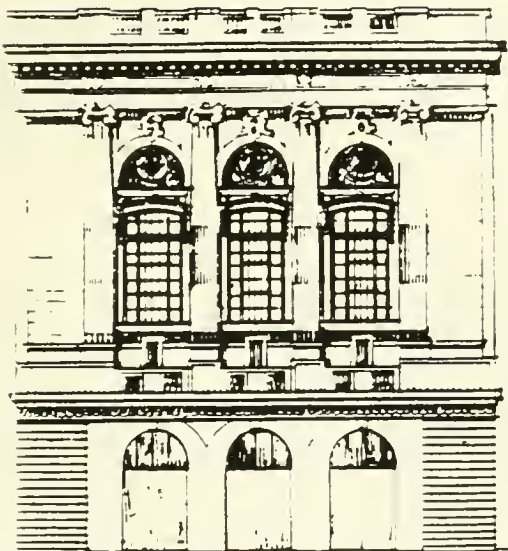


WILBUR

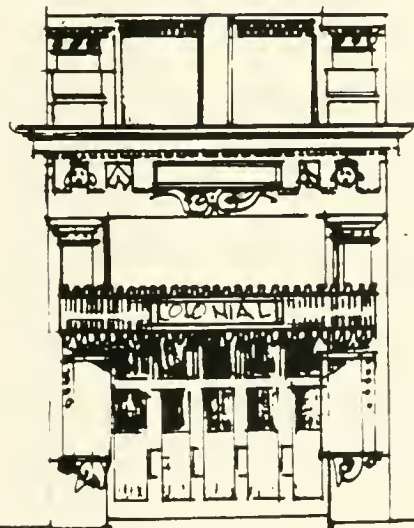


CHARLES STREET PLAYHOUSE

HISTORIC THEATER FACADES



SAXON



COLONIAL



SHUBERT

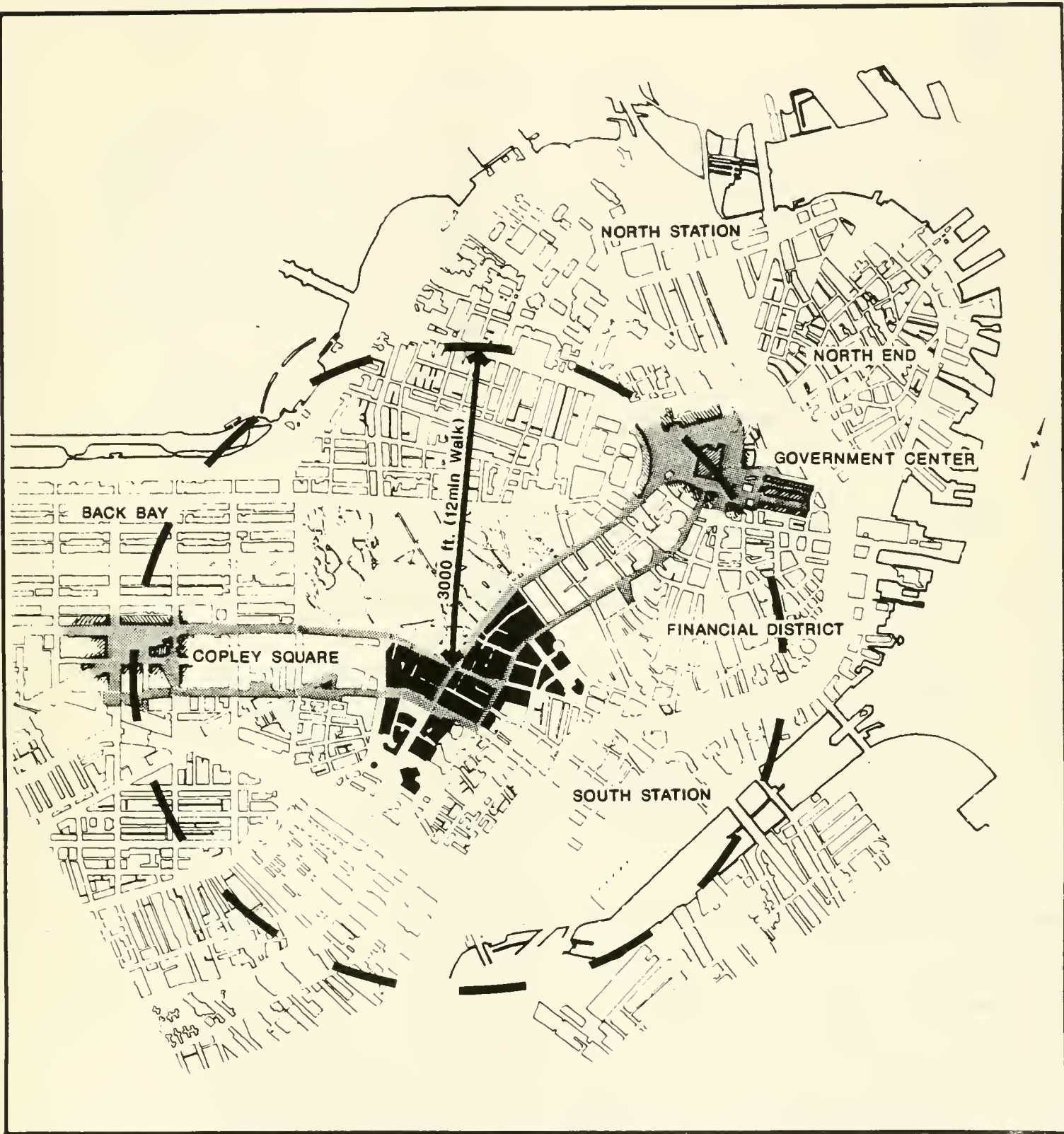
TRANSPORTATION AND PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

Transportation planning for the Midtown/Cultural District is being undertaken by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in cooperation with the Boston Transportation Department, and a transportation consultant. The Midtown/Cultural District is within walking distance of a large population of city workers and residents and is served by the MBTA's Green, Orange, and Red lines. South Station is nearby, as is highway access from the Southeast Expressway/Central Artery and the Massachusetts Turnpike.

The Midtown/Cultural District is at the center of the downtown's transportation network. Its streets tie together the Back Bay, South Cove, Chinatown, South Station, Financial District, Government Center, and Beacon Hill neighborhoods. Transportation improvements within the Midtown/Cultural District will improve traffic circulation throughout the downtown. Planning for the transportation needs in the District includes the following goals:

- o Minimizing traffic impacts on surrounding neighborhoods and pedestrian areas will be a major concern in the planning process. The Midtown/Cultural District Transportation Plan will consider the needs of the wide variety of existing and anticipated users, including office and retail workers, regional shoppers, residents, and leisure-time users.
- o Mitigating traffic impacts on surrounding neighborhoods; improving vehicle circulation from downtown gateways directly to parking facilities; establishing and enforcing loading regulations to minimize effects on traffic and pedestrians; improving the pedestrian access and safety; and minimizing congestion and adverse impacts on neighborhoods and pedestrian areas during new construction.

A comprehensive capital improvements program for the Midtown/Cultural District includes the reconstruction of Essex Street, construction of sidewalks on Lower Washington Street and improvements to Elliot Norton Park. Additional improvements to the District's public open space system will add paving, lighting, signage and other amenities.



PEDESTRIAN ACCESS FROM THE DOWNTOWN AND BACK BAY

ACHIEVING THE PLAN

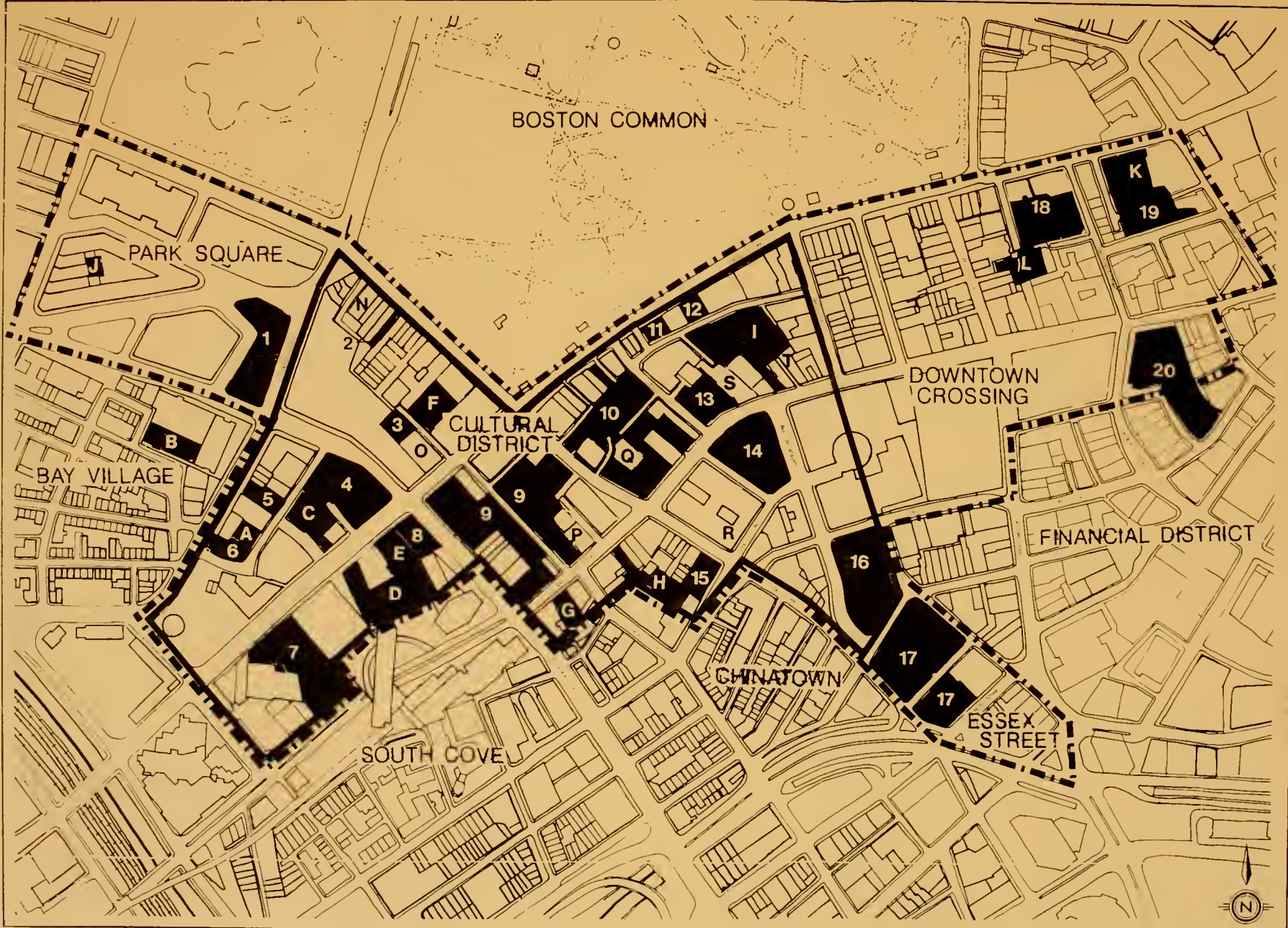
The BRA and the Mayor's Office of Art's and Humanities will continue to work with representatives of over 50 cultural performing groups, 42 visual art galleries, local and regional museums, the Chinatown and South Cove neighborhood groups, and local businesses to develop the framework that will lead to the preparation and implementation of the District Plan. New zoning regulations will establish height and massing guidelines for the Midtown/Cultural District through a two-year community planning process. The interim zoning enacted on September 25, 1987, will set standards for development in the Midtown/Cultural District during this planning process. Most of the District is included in a medium growth area, with a height limit of 125'-155'.

- o The Midtown Cultural District planning process will explore a variety of implementation methods to achieve the Plan's objectives. These methods will include new zoning, design review controls, capital improvement programs, and private grants and other fundraising activities, among others.
- o A Cultural District Trust, a non-profit public/private partnership, could be organized to plan, implement, and manage cultural resources. Private foundation grants, increased corporate support, contributions and fundraising must provide a significant portion of the capital funds required to build proposed cultural facilities, and the operating expenses of these facilities.
- o As part of a community-based master planning process in Chinatown, a four part survey is being undertaken. The survey focuses on housing conditions and household characteristics; neighborhood users; neighborhood employers and businesses; and land uses. Preliminary results of the housing survey indicate high density and lack of open space; large households, small units, and overcrowding; and lack of homeownership. The Midtown/Cultural District plan will explore the possibility of linking development benefits in the District to the Chinatown community that will address these needs.
- o The comprehensive planning effort by the City for the Midtown/Cultural District also involves the expertise of six consultant firms, each of whom have extensive urban design and planning experience including work in Boston:
 - Benjamin Thompson & Associates are preparing design studies of the public realm, including streets, public spaces and cultural facilities.
 - Skidmore, Owings & Merrill of Chicago are preparing an urban design analysis and skyline studies to illustrate district massing options. Additionally they are producing a series of conceptual design alternatives for the Hinge Block's central public plaza and performing arts space.
 - TAMS consultants are conducting a transportation study which includes an analysis of traffic circulation patterns, traffic congestion, and an assessment of public transportation and parking requirements for the district.

- Enid Reisser of Chicago, Illinois is assisting the Office of Arts and Humanities with a needs assessment survey to determine the space needs of individual artists and arts organizations.
- Brannigan-Lorelli Associates of New York, as experts in theater design, are providing consulting services to locate and plan theater facilities for local performing arts groups and develop specifications for these new theaters.
- The Institute of Contemporary Art is providing visual arts consultant services to assist in developing guidelines for art in public spaces and performance art, as well as the coordination of visual arts events in the district.

The work of these consultants will be reviewed by community groups and the BRA in order to develop a final plan for the Midtown/Cultural District.

MIDTOWN IMPROVEMENT AREA



MIDTOWN/CULTURAL DISTRICT

- Active Theaters**
- A Charles Playhouse
 - B Cinema 57
 - C Shubert Theater
 - D Wang Center
 - E Wilbur Theater
 - F Colonial Theater
 - G Cinema (Chinese movies)
 - H Pilgrim Theater (adult movies)
 - I Opera House
 - J Park Plaza Hotel Cabaret
 - K Tremont Temple
 - L Orpheum Theater

- Vacant Theaters**
- N Steinert Hall
 - O Saxon (Majestic) Theater
 - P Publix Theater
 - Q State Theater
 - R Essex Theater
 - S Paramount Theater
 - T Modern Theater

- Development Sites**
- 1 Park Square
 - 2 146 Boylston Street
 - 3 Gary Theater Lot
 - 4 South Cove Parcel C 4
 - 5 Edison Parking Lot
 - 6 South Cove Parcel C 2
 - 7 South Cove Parcel P 1
 - 8 South Cove Parcel P 7
 - 9 Hinge Block (multiple parcels)
 - 10 Commonwealth Center (4 parcels)
 - 11 Parkside West
 - 12 Parkside East
 - 13 Keith Block (4 parcels)
 - 14 Hayward Place
 - 15 35-45 Essex Street
 - 16 67 Kingston Street
 - 17 Kingston-Bedford Garage Line (E)
 - 18 110 Tremont Street
 - 19 Tremont Temple
 - 20 Woolworth's Redevelopment Proposal

- 1-20 Development Sites**
- A-L Active Theatres**
- N-T Inactive Theatres**
- Midtown**
- Cultural District**

CONCEPTUAL PLAN



CULTURAL DISTRICT PLAN PERFORMING AND VISUAL ARTS FACILITIES

Existing Active Theaters

1. Charles Playhouse	400 seats, 200 seats, 150 seats
2. Shubert Theater	1,600 seats
3. Wang Center	4,000 seats
4. Wilbur Theater	1,200 seats
5. Colonial Theater	1,650 seats
6. Opera House	2,300 seats
7. Cinema	Chinese movie

Vacant Buildings to be Renovated

A. Saxon (Majestic)	for 799 seat proscenium theater
B. Publix (Gaiety)	for visual arts center's international film cinema
C. Pilgrim Theater	for Asian arts center (now adult films)
D. Essex Theater	for 199 seat dance theater and for 199 seat experimental theater
E. Paramount Theater	for dance club/cabaret
F. Modern Theater	for 400 seat concert hall
G. Liberty Tree Halls	for studio/rehearsal space
H. Former Chauncy St. Power Station	for studio/rehearsal space
I. Steinert Hall	reuse potential unknown

New Facilities to be Constructed as part of Mixed-use Developments

a. Parcel C-4	for one 199 seat experimental theater
b. Hinge Block parcels	for several visual arts exhibit spaces and one 199 seat experimental theater
c. Parcel 30	new Y.M.C.U. facilities for 499 seat dance theater and for 399 seat flex-space theater
d. Hayward Place Site	for 200 seat concert hall
e. Former Gary Theater Site	for shop/storage space

- Active Theaters
- Inactive Theaters
- "Theater Alleys"
- "Theater Boulevards"

★ Downtown and Neighborhood Cultural Facilities



1 Allston-Brighton

Boston University Concert Hall
Brighton BPL Branch Library
Faneuil BPL Branch Library
Double Edge Theatre

2 Back Bay

Institute of Contemporary Art
Newbury Street Art Galleries
Boston Shakespeare Company—
St. Botolph Street Theater
Theatre Loft
American Preview Stage
YWCA Auditorium
Newbury Street Theatre
at Community Church
John Hancock Hall,
Dorothy Quincy Suite
New England Life Hall
Boston Public Library,
Copley Square
Berklee Performance Center
Boston Architectural Center

3 Beacon Hill

Lyric Stage—
Suffolk University Theatre
African Meeting House

4 Charlestown

Charlestown Working Theatre
Charlestown BPL Branch

5 Dorchester

Harriet McCormack Center
for the Arts (Strand Theatre)
Whiton Hall
Pierce Building
Uphams Corner Arts Center
(proposed)
BPL Branch Libraries
Wm. E. Reed Auditorium,
Prince Hall Masonic Temple

6 East Boston

Harborside Community School
BPL Branch Libraries
Maverick Square Studios
Saratoga Street Studios

7 Huntington Ave / Fenway

Museum of Fine Arts
Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum
Boston University Theatre—
Huntington Theatre Company
Symphony Hall
Jordan Hall
(New England Conservatory)
Boston Lyric Opera
Boston Conservatory
Boston Film-Video
Foundation Workshops
Wheelock Family Theatre
Fenway Studios
School of Museum Fine Arts,
Grossman Gallery
Northeastern University,
Alumni Auditorium

8 Hyde Park / Roslindale

Hyde Park BPL Branch Library
Roslindale BPL Branch Library

9 Jamaica Plain

Multicultural Arts Center
Eliot Hall—Footlight Club
Connolly BPL Branch Library

10 Mission Hill

Tower Auditorium
Mass. College of Art
Trustman Gallery, Simmons College
North Hall Gallery,
Mass. College of Art
St. Alphonsus Theatre
(rehabilitation)
Parker Hill BPL Branch

11 North End

BPL Branch Library
Nucleo Eclettico
North End Union

12 Roxbury/Dudley

Roxbury Center for Performing Arts
BPL Branch Libraries at Dudley,
Egleston Square, Grove Hall,
and Parker Hill
Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts
Museum of the National Center
for Afro-American Artists
Studio Collective of Roxbury
L'Alianza Hispana

13 South Boston

Fort Point Arts Community
BPL Branch Libraries
South Boston Artists Group
Children's Museum

14 South End

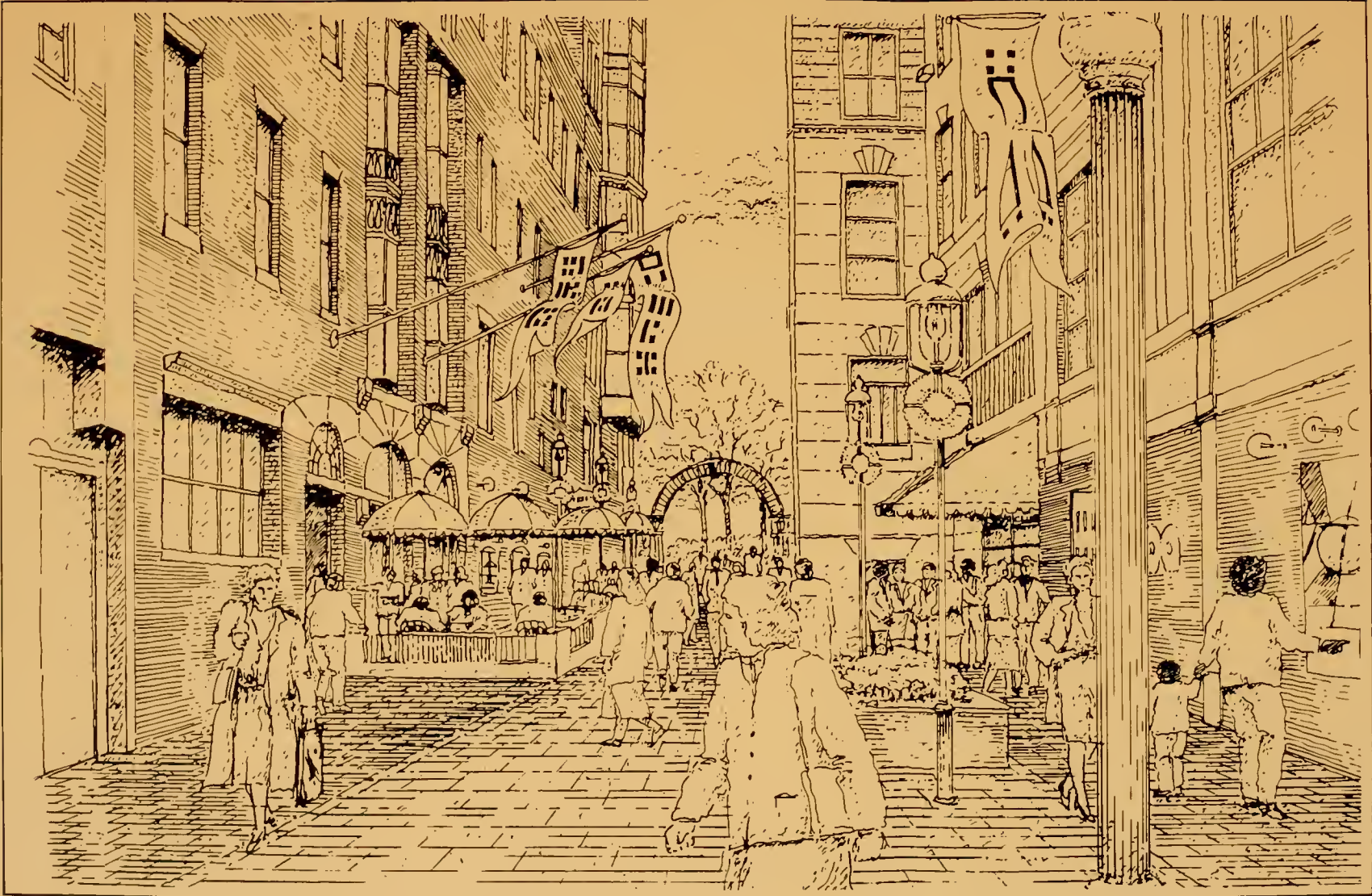
Boston Center for the Arts
Mills Gallery
Cyclorama
National Theatre
New Ehrlich Theatre
Boston Ballet
City Stage Company
Community Music Center
Boston Youth Theatre
Piano Craft Guild
Home, Inc.
Paramount Penthouse Theatre
Villa Victoria Cultural Center
City Lights

15 West Roxbury

West Roxbury BPL Branch Library

Boylston Place

Theater Alley



SIDEWALK CAFES



MUSIC AND DANCE CLUBS



FESTIVE STREETSCAPING

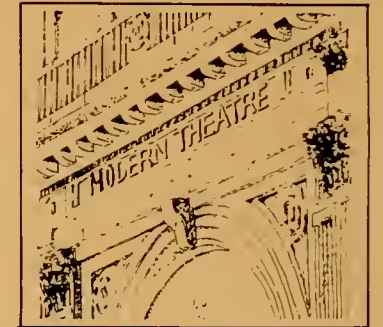
Washington Street



Theater Boulevard



OPERA HOUSE



HISTORIC THEATERS



PEDESTRIAN ORIENTED STREET

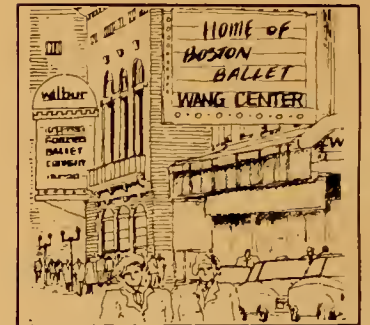
Tremont Street



Theater Boulevard



SHUBERT THEATER



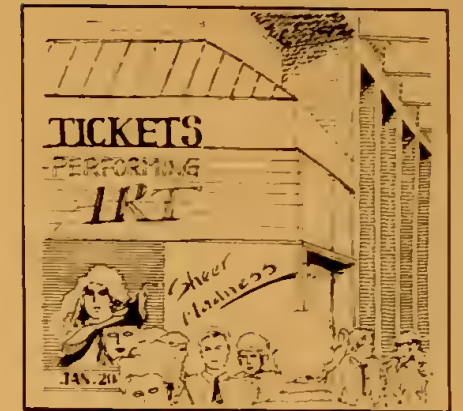
WILBUR/WANG CENTER



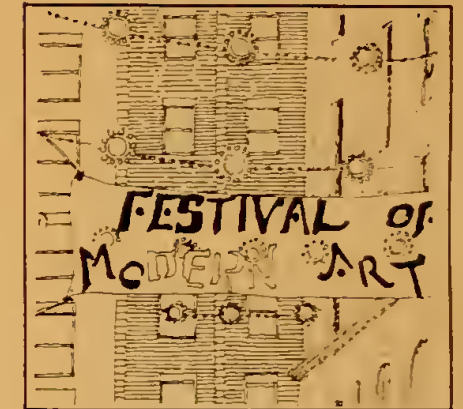
PUBLIC ART

Hayward Place

Theater Alley



THEATERS & CONCERT HALLS



SPECIAL EVENTS



ART GALLERIES

CBD
B65R
1987

AUTHOR

Midtown Cultural District..

TITLE

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME

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